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who practise in Secundrabad and Hyderabad, and a few even go to the well-equipped hospitals for prolonged treatment of difficult and persistent diseases. However, for the majority of the population the only medicines used for ordinary ailments are the inexpensive indigenous herbs and drugs which are locally available.

The local post office, under one of the village schoolmasters, serves Shamirpet and a large number of adjoining villages. The system of mail distribution in the countryside is very defective. Often the village postman takes a month or even more to reach a village on his periodic rounds. Letters are generally delivered personally to people who come to the post office for them, or they are handed to a co-villager who happens to visit the post office, for further transmission.

The police station at Shamirpet is in charge of a sub-inspector and has a strength of two head constables and twelve constables. This force is responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the villages under its jurisdiction. The police keep an eye on all doubtful characters, organize regular patrols of the villages and through the subordinate officials keep themselves informed of local developments. Their official records register all births and deaths, which must be reported by the inhabitants of the village.

As the tank is more than a mile from the village, the people use well water for domestic purposes. In respect of wells, Shamirpet has been very unlucky. Out of a total of thirty-three wells within the village limits, there are only three which yield good, drinkable water, the water of all other wells being brackish and unpalatable. Most people are therefore able to use sweet water only for drinking and cooking, whilst clothes and household utensils are washed in brackish water. The outlying wards of the Malas and Madigas are more fortunate in this respect, for their wells, situated at a distance of about half a mile from their respective colonies, yield 'sweet' water. In the summer months there is often an acute scarcity of drinking water in the village, and at this time large crowds of women gather at the few sweet-water wells waiting patiently to fill their many brass and earthen pots. This time of enforced waiting is spent in gossiping, in exchanging news and often in relating the latest scandals.

The sanitation of the village is the responsibility of the Yetti Madigas, whose traditional duty it is to sweep the street and lanes; in return for the service, the government grants them the use of certain rent-free lands. 27

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Living Together

1. INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS

The people of Shamirpet, like the other peasants of Andhra, exercise considerable reserve in their initial dealings with outsiders. The first impression that one gets regarding their attitude is one of extreme constriction, suspiciousness and guarded behaviour. When this initial reserve is broken down, they reveal themselves in a totally different light—as emotional, communicative, and at times even boisterous. Nearly all of them have great curiosity, and are easily attracted by anything that is even slightly uncommon or unusual. Opinions are freely expressed, and all public gatherings—big or small—are rather noisy. Middle-aged and elderly people generally have a grim expression, and it is considered a mark of respectability in women if they walk with their eyes downcast. But unobtrusiveness is not regarded as a virtue, and the people freely make comments and counter-comments on all subjects with which they may or may not have any concern. There is a great tradition for argument, which can easily drift into becoming a noisy quarrel or altercation. Tempers rise easily, and abuse may be showered volubly by both sides; but differences are patched up as easily, and it is not uncommon to see two people walking together as great friends although on the previous day they may have quarrelled bitterly on some trifling issue. In their inter-personal relations the people are hypercritical and very sensitive. This leads to a perpetual attitude of fault finding. As the people do not easily let go an opportunity of commenting on and criticizing their neighbours, their relations are never very smooth and certain. However, on occasions which demand a display of good-neighbourliness and generosity people

come forward very readily to help those who need it. It is common to suspect others' motives; and not unusual to be always on the alert to read hidden meanings into the seemingly innocent utterances of others. Analysis of their life-histories shows that the people are not given to introspection. They are always on the defensive; but their inter-personal relations are not characterized by detachment. In their thoughts, likes and dislikes they are quite open, and all persons having even casual contacts have a fair acquaintance with one anothers' ideas and attitudes

It is not uncommon for people to analyse and describe the personality-traits of other inhabitants of the village as well as of outsiders coming into the settlement. Positive qualities, having obvious approval, find expression in such epithets as: 'good person', 'hard-working', 'honest', 'respectable', 'well-behaved', 'intelligent', 'generous' or 'large-hearted' and 'faithful'. Epithets describing negative traits which do not meet with social approval are many and varied, and among others include: 'bad person', 'lazy', 'dishonest', 'shameless', 'mannerless', 'foolish', 'miserly', 'small-hearted', 'unfaithful', 'good-for-nothing', 'liar', 'all talk but no deeds', 'ill-tempered', etc. Analysis of such traits is firmly established in the culture-pattern, and occupies an important place in the conversation of the people when they meet in small groups. Although conformity to social norms is idealized and emphasized, when there is a breach of traditional ways the person responsible likes to confess it in confidence to someone else. Long conversations and the mutual sharing of secrets are quite frequent. However, when friendships break up the sanctity of earlier secrets is not protected by any code of honour. Within limits originality and innovation are admired; but excess and ostentation soon lead to social censure and ridicule.

Subjects coming under the critical eye of society are: (i) breaches of traditional norms, (ii) display and exhibitionism, (iii) sexuality, (iv) efforts to rise in the power hierarchy, (v) conspicuous success, and (vi) originality and 'too many new ideas'. Carrying tales and 'whispering about the doings in others' houses' go on in the community on a wide scale. It is criticized by the aggrieved persons and their sympathizers, but no one regards it as inherently bad. 'Incidents' or breaches of established norms are discussed in small conversational groups at first, and the more important ones among them gradually filter through and reach the respon-

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admiration of their age-group. For the girls it is a rather difficult period, as they have to find a middle way between the dictates of their romantic impulses and the fear of the social censure that comes to all wayward girls. Adolescent boys divide their time more or less equally between 'learning to do things' with their parents and being with their playmates. Childish games in the dust are now replaced by more vigorous country sport. Within the age-group itself thoughts and efforts in the domain of sex come to occupy a very important place. Masturbation is now regarded as 'unmanly' and gradually given up. Lying with other boys is also looked down upon. Efforts are made to attract younger girls for first experimentation in heterosexual love. Far more than these actual experiments, fantasies occupy an important place in their thoughts and conversation. Imaginary affairs with a woman believed to be of easy virtue—or with a completely fictitious character from a distant village—are vividly and elaborately described. Growth of the pubic hair and genital organs is closely watched and compared. In this way they slowly reach their youth when talks for their marriage are opened. On marriage they acquire a new social status.

After marriage the young men and women have to give considerable attention to their economic pursuits and crafts, and as such they have relatively little time left for group activity. Yet, their leisure and time are generally spent in the company of persons belonging more or less to the same age-group, who constitute 'a set of friends'. Important activities of these groups include loafing, playing card games, gossip and conversation. They may even go to the city together; and always act in unison when planning mischief. Confidences are exchanged within these groups; and people often narrate to each other their recent exploits. One of the favourite themes is boasting regarding success in sexual adventures. Success—real or imaginary—with an adolescent girl is vividly described within this narrow circle. Graphic and vivid details are always added to make the account more colourful. 'It was her very first experience. Oh, there was so much blood. I did not know whether to pacify her or to concentrate on the act', one would say. This would start a chain in which all others would narrate their parallel experiences—many of which would be slightly modified editions of often-told tales. The *motif* of a girl being frightened by the largeness of a man's organ also

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keeps on repeating itself. Some young men introduce a note of slight sadism when they talk of their 'forcing-in' acts against unwilling partners. General comments about the goings on in the village are an important item in the activities of these groups. The latest scandals are discussed and spread to the rest of the community in one or other of these groups. Women are classified into sexual categories, such as 'the easy' type, 'invite you and later say "no"' type, 'the wrestler' type and 'the hollow'. Code words are employed to describe different persons. Peculiarities and weaknesses of men are also noted and commented upon. Domestic duties do not leave much leisure to young married women. Consequently they cannot plan any group activity. But they too can exchange views, and discuss the latest affairs and developments while they wait near the well for their turn to draw water or when they go out for washing the clothes and bathing.

Middle-aged people have their own groups. These are informal conversational gatherings; but their membership and attendance is nearly fixed. Groups of men and women meet separately; although two or three women in the village are privileged and have access to some of the men's groups. The village has twelve to fourteen men's groups, out of which three are politically and socially influential and important. In practically each quarter of the village there are one or two groups of elderly women. While the membership of the men's groups remains fairly stationary, that of the women's groups changes very often, varying according to recent quarrels or patching up of past differences. Most of the men's groups are formed round some central, politically influential figure. Gossip and politics appear to be their most important functions. Day to day developments in the village are discussed, and often the line to be taken in the central village council is worked out here long before the council's session. All these groups consist of two kinds of members—'regulars', whose loyalty and affiliation are not in doubt; and 'occasionals', whose affiliations are shaky, but who turn up periodically out of curiosity or with a definite purpose. These groups play a significant part in managing the affairs of the village, for their comments circulating in the village by word of mouth set the pace and direction for further action by the community in most matters. It should be added here that these groups comprise mostly the middle-aged people. While some ambitious young men seek to attend them, the aged generally